Journal of Philosophy and Linguistics
Research Article Peer-review, Open Access

The Representation of the Image of "Woman" in French Proverbs and Phraseological Units

Begmatov A'zam [1]

Abstract: This article examines the representation of the image of woman in French proverbs and phraseological units, focusing on evaluative scales used to characterize female personality. The analysis takes into account not only behavioral traits but also the role of real-life events and social realities reflected in language. Particular attention is paid to positive and negative attitudes toward female beauty as shaped in French collective consciousness. Gender-marked proverbs and phraseological units containing the image of woman are comparatively analyzed, highlighting their evaluative connotations. Based on semantic and pragmatic analysis, conclusions are drawn regarding cultural perceptions of women as expressed through the studied linguistic units.

Keywords: phraseology, concept of woman, objective component, negative attitude, positive attitude.

[1] *Associate Professor, Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages*

Introduction

Phraseological units in any language reflect the national mentality formed over generations across long historical periods. Proverbs and phraseological expressions are widely used in everyday speech and convey both direct and figurative meanings. Proverbs, as complete sentence structures often characterized by rhyme, represent condensed forms of folk wisdom with didactic and advisory functions.

According to A. V. Artemova, phraseological units and proverbs serve as mirrors of national culture, encapsulating customs, traditions, and significant cultural information related to the perception of the world. From this perspective, the study of the lexical-semantic level of the "woman" concept in proverbs and phraseological units is of particular importance (Artemova, 2000, p. 5).

Proverbs and phraseological units associated with the concept of woman often perform instructive and evaluative functions, assessing real-life phenomena, events, objects, and individuals on scales such as good–bad, moral–immoral, acceptable–unacceptable. In evaluating the image of woman, both objective and subjective factors are involved. Subjective evaluation reflects positive or negative attitudes toward the object, whereas objective evaluation assesses the inherent nature of objects and phenomena based on socially accepted norms and standards.

The concept of "woman" in French proverbs and phraseological units includes an objective component that reflects the moral values and worldview of the French people. Often, attitudes toward female beauty are expressed ironically. For example:

Ciel pommelé et femme fardée ne font pas longue durée ("A dappled sky and a painted woman do not last long").

This proverb compares the transience of natural phenomena with artificial beauty, implying that external adornment cannot conceal inherent unattractiveness. The pragmatic meaning carries a negative evaluative connotation.

Similarly, the proverb *La plus belle femme du monde ne peut donner que ce qu'elle a* conveys the conservative notion that even the most beautiful woman possesses nothing beyond her beauty, reflecting a male-centered evaluative perspective.

In some cases, women are seemingly exalted, yet a hidden irony remains. For instance, *Ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut* ("What a woman wants, God wants") appears to elevate female will, but literary interpretations, such as Théophile Gautier's commentary, reveal skepticism and implicit negation of its literal meaning.

Negative representations of women are particularly evident in proverbs such as: *Fumée, pluie et femme sans raison chassent l'homme de la maison* ("Smoke, rain, and a woman without reason drive a man out of the house").

Here, household disorder and female talkativeness are juxtaposed, implicitly placing domestic responsibility on women while simultaneously mocking male dependency.

Women are sometimes compared to animals:

Des femmes et des chevaux, il n'en est point sans défaut ("Neither women nor horses are without faults"), suggesting that women, like horses, must be controlled—an overtly patriarchal implication.

In certain cases, proverbs convey neutral meanings through metaphorical language, as in:

C'est le diable qui bat sa femme et marie sa fille, which metaphorically refers to sudden weather changes rather than literal domestic relations, though secondary negative interpretations remain possible.

Positive representations are less frequent but present, such as:

Il faut être compagnon de sa femme et maître de son cheval ("One should be a companion to one's wife and a master of one's horse"), emphasizing balance between affection and authority.

Overall, subjective negative evaluations of women in French phraseology significantly outweigh positive ones. Proverbs like *Prenez maison faite et la femme à faire* suggest that an inexperienced wife is preferable, reflecting an instrumental and pedagogical view of marriage.

Some proverbs go further, discouraging marriage altogether:

Qui veut tenir nette sa maison n'y mette femme, prêtre ni pigeon portrays women as inherently disruptive, reinforcing deeply rooted gender bias.

The expression *Qui femme a, guerre a* ("He who has a wife has war") portrays women as a source of conflict, while *Qui épouse la femme épouse les dettes* suggests that marrying a woman entails accepting her burdens unconditionally.

Disrespect toward women and denial of their autonomy appear frequently, often masked by irony. For example:
Faute de mieux, le roi couche avec sa femme implies male entitlement to seek beauty elsewhere.

Some proverbs reference historical figures:

La femme de César ne doit pas être soupçonnée implies immunity from moral scrutiny due to social

status.

Urban metaphors also reflect gendered perceptions, as in:

Paris est le paradis des femmes, le purgatoire des hommes et l'enfer des chevaux, portraying Paris as a city of indulgence favoring women at men's expense.

Phraseological units further depict women as dominant or rebellious, such as *C'est sa femme qui porte les chausses* ("His wife wears the trousers"), corresponding to similar expressions in Russian and Uzbek.

Proverbs involving the word *fille* ("girl") are fewer and tend to carry less negative connotations, often expressing life wisdom rather than overt misogyny. Examples include *Une fille suit les mœurs de sa mère*, emphasizing intergenerational influence, comparable to Uzbek proverbs with similar meanings.

Some proverbs contain culturally specific meanings that resist literal translation. For example: *Mai pluvieux marie le laboureur et sa fille* metaphorically implies agricultural prosperity leading to social stability and marriage opportunities.

Methodology

The methodological framework of this study is based on a combination of qualitative linguistic analysis methods. The primary research material consists of French proverbs and phraseological units containing explicit or implicit references to women, extracted from authoritative phraseological dictionaries, collections of aphorisms, and literary sources.

The research employs semantic analysis to identify evaluative meanings embedded in phraseological units, focusing on positive, negative, and neutral connotations associated with the image of woman. Contextual and pragmatic analysis is applied to determine how these expressions function in discourse and what cultural attitudes they convey. Additionally, comparative analysis is used selectively to draw parallels between French proverbs and corresponding expressions in other languages, particularly Russian and Uzbek, in order to highlight universal and culture-specific gender stereotypes.

The study also relies on the principles of linguoculturology, viewing proverbs as culturally marked linguistic units that reflect collective consciousness and social norms. Evaluative scales such as moral–immoral, rational–irrational, dominant–subordinate are employed to systematize the representations of women in the analyzed material.

Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that French proverbs and phraseological units construct the image of woman predominantly through evaluative and judgmental lenses. The majority of the studied units express negative subjective evaluations, often emphasizing such traits as irrationality, talkativeness, instability, and domestic disorder. These representations reflect deeply rooted patriarchal norms that position women as sources of conflict and disruption within family and social structures.

A recurring semantic pattern is the association of women with transience and artificiality, particularly in proverbs addressing female beauty. External attractiveness is frequently portrayed as deceptive or short-lived, while inner value is either ignored or denied. Even when women are seemingly praised, the praise is often accompanied by irony, which neutralizes or reverses the positive evaluation.

Comparisons of women with animals or inanimate objects further reinforce hierarchical gender relations, suggesting control, ownership, or supervision by men. Such metaphors indicate an instrumental perception of women rather than recognition of their autonomy. Phraseological units depicting women as dominant figures, for example those implying role reversal in marriage, are framed negatively, presenting female authority as abnormal or undesirable.

At the same time, a limited number of proverbs convey neutral or conditionally positive meanings, particularly those emphasizing companionship, balance, or moral influence within the family. Proverbs involving the concept of fille ("girl") tend to be less evaluatively marked, focusing more on upbringing,

inheritance of moral values, and social continuity. This contrast suggests that negative stereotyping intensifies when women are viewed in marital or adult social roles.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that French proverbial discourse preserves traditional gender stereotypes, while linguistic irony serves as a key pragmatic tool for masking overt discrimination.

Conclusion

The study of French proverbs and phraseological units representing the image of woman confirms that proverbial language functions as a powerful repository of cultural memory and social ideology. The lexical-semantic analysis shows a clear predominance of negative evaluative meanings, reflecting male-centered perspectives and patriarchal value systems embedded in the French linguistic worldview.

Women are frequently portrayed as irrational, unstable, or problematic, with their social roles confined primarily to domestic and marital spheres. Positive representations, when present, are limited in number and often undermined by irony or conditional acceptance. This imbalance indicates that proverbs do not merely describe reality but actively shape and reinforce gender norms and expectations.

At the same time, the presence of neutral and metaphorical expressions demonstrates the semantic complexity of proverbial discourse, where meanings may shift depending on context and interpretation. The analysis highlights the importance of viewing phraseological units not as isolated linguistic phenomena but as culturally and pragmatically motivated constructions.

In conclusion, French proverbs and phraseological units offer valuable insight into historical and cultural attitudes toward women. Their study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language encodes gender-based evaluations and preserves social hierarchies. Further research may involve diachronic analysis or cross-cultural comparison to explore the transformation of gender representations in contemporary discourse.

References

1. Artemova, A. V. (2000). Emotive-evaluative objectification of the concept “woman” in the semantics of phraseological units. Pyatigorsk.
2. Gautier, T. (1988). Mademoiselle de Maupin. Moscow.
3. Ilyin, D. N. (2005). Processes of positivation and negativation of lexical meaning. Rostov-on-Don.
4. Lastochkina, P., & Nagornaya, N. (2003). The image of woman in the worldview of English language speakers. Novgorod.
5. Kondratov, A. P. (2005). The Great Encyclopedia of Aphorisms. Moscow: Ripol Classic.
6. Recker, Y. I. (Ed.). (1963). French–Russian Phraseological Dictionary. Moscow.
7. Lakoff, R. (1975). Language and Woman’s Place. New York: Harper & Row.
8. Wierzbicka, A. (1997). Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9. Cameron, D. (2005). Language, Gender, and Sexuality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Tannen, D. (1994). Gender and Discourse. Oxford: Oxford University Press.